Dedication

The Foundation for American Christian Education dedicates this facsimile edition of Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary to the Christian students of America, who, under the guidance of their parents and teachers, are developing a character of obedience to God's Biblical principles of life and liberty.

J. De Mare
From a Miniature in Ivory

GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-FIVE

After eight long years as Commander-in-Chief of the army of the Republic, Washington was ready to resign his commission. He wrote from his Head Quarters at Newburgh, June 14, 1783, in his circular letter to the States, "I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have you, and the State over which you preside, in his holy protection, that he would incline the hearts of the Citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to Government, to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another, for their fellow Citizens of the United States at large, and particularly for their brethren who have served in the Field, and finally, that he would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all, to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristicks of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation."

"America has furnished to the world the character of Washington! And if our American institutions had done nothing else, that alone would have entitled them to the respect of mankind." – Daniel Webster, Bunker Hill Monument Address, 1843

American Christian History Education Series

Sequoia gigantea, or Big Tree, grows only on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California at elevations varying from 5,000 to 8,500 feet above sea level. Individuals of this species are the largest living things on the face of the globe. Ranging from 250 to 330 feet high their diameters at the base vary approximately from 20 to 35 feet.

The Sequoia gigantea seems to go on living indefinitely and may stand as long as one hundred generations. The cells of its cambrium layer and of the growing tips appear never to lose the ability to grow and reproduce. The tannin content of bark and wood discourages insects and fungi and retards fire. Even when fallen, the heartwood may stay sound for hundreds of years.

Giant Sequoias seldom produce cones until they are at least one hundred years of age. Each cone, from one to three inches long, contains 100 to 300 seeds, but these are so small that it takes 3,000 to weigh one ounce. Without the industrious pine squirrel very few sequoia cones would be dropped by the sequoias. Scampering in the treetops the squirrels cut off cones which sometimes fall as fast as seven or eight per minute. Later the squirrels hide the cones in holes and logs, and other likely niches — provision for the winter ahead. Cones stored in damp places usually remain closed, but those that can dry soon open and shed their seeds.

The age of living sequoias is difficult to determine but the annual ring count of cut trees has indicated that many are from 3,000 to 4,000 years old. Some of these trees in California were already majestic giants when the star of Bethlehem rose in the heavens. Here they reremained while the Chain of Christianity moved westward with "signs following" — the liberty of the individual, and of nations. Just yesterday, in a sequoia's life, came the flowering of these Bethlehem principles in government — "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness — That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men. . . ."

"WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS, THERE IS LIBERTY." II CORINTHIANS 3:17

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REPUBLISHED IN FACSIMILE EDITION BY
FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
TO DOCUMENT AND DEMONSTRATE:

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II. "TO THE YOUTH OF THE UNITED STATES" THE BEST AMERICAN AND ENGLISH AUTHORS AS AUTHORITIES IN THE USE AND DEFINITION OF LANGUAGE.

III. TO ALL AMERICANS "THAT THE PRINCIPLES OF REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT HAVE THEIR ORIGIN IN THE SCRIPTURES."

PREFACED BY AN ARTICLE:

NOAH WEBSTER, FOUNDING FATHER OF AMERICAN SCHOLARSHIP AND EDUCATION

BY ROSALIE J. SLATER, M.A.

"IF THE FOUNDATIONS BE DESTROYED, WHAT CAN THE RIGHTEOUS DO?" PSALM XI:3

FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
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NOAH WEBSTER'S 1828 DICTIONARY NEEDED TO RESTORE AN AMERICAN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE HOME, THE CHURCH AND THE SCHOOL

"If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Psalms 11:3

BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS RESTORED

Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* was produced during the years when the American home, church and school were established upon a Biblical and a patriotic basis. Webster, descended on his mother's side from Pilgrim Governor, William Bradford of Plymouth Plantation, made important contributions to an American educational system which kept the nation upon a Christian Constitutional course for many years. The famous "blue-backed Speller," his "Grammars," and "Readers," all contained Biblical and patriotic themes and Webster spearheaded the flood of educational volumes emphasizing Christian, Constitutional values for more than a century. It is not surprising, therefore, that the 1828 *American Dictionary* should contain the greatest number of Biblical definitions given in any secular volume. Webster considered "education useless without the Bible" and while he cautioned against too extensive use of the Bible in the schools as "tending to irreverence" he reiterated "In my view, the Christian religion is the *most important and one of the first things* in which *all* children, under a free government, ought to be instructed. . . . No truth is more evident to my mind than that the Christian religion must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people. . . ."

Today when the Biblical basis of education is under systematic attack we need to capitalize upon the availability of our first American dictionary — the only dictionary in the world to *"draw water out of the wells of salvation"* — to utilize God's written word as a key to the meaning of words. Historically, it documents the degree to which the Bible was America's basic text book in all fields.

CHRISTIAN CONSTITUTIONAL MEANINGS RESTORED

Upon Horace Mann rests the blame for removing from the curriculum the study of an American philosophy of government. Opposed to the fundamental conceptions of our American Constitution namely, property, self-government and voluntary union, Horace Mann, "the father of progressive education," removed the *spirit* of Constitutionalism and allowed only the *letter* to remain. The Bible, which Noah Webster indicated as the source of "the principles of republican government" was closed to its primary function — namely to testify of God's redeeming grace for mankind through Jesus Christ. Actually, it was Horace Mann in the 1840's who removed the Bible and its sacred purpose from the schools, not the United States Supreme Court in the 1960's.

Through the European pilgrimages of Horace Mann and his contemporaries the alien seeds of foreign ideolo-

gies and philosophies of education were implanted in American soil. The independence from European "maxims of government" which Noah Webster had worked so diligently to achieve was subverted during the early years when American education was made the ward of the state. *A Federal Catechism,* part of *The American Spelling Book,* had introduced civics into the curriculum in 1794. It gave a short explanation of the principles of the American Constitutional form of government and defined America as "a representative republic." The "defects of democracy" were discussed and students learned distinctly why a "federal representative republic" is "a better form of government." Shortly after schools became organized under state systems the substitution of *democracy* for *republic* was made.

Today the necessity for restoring the clarity and identity of Constitutional meanings is obvious if we are to make substantial progress in rebuilding the foundations upon which this nation was established. Without a standard of reference for America's history and philosophy of government students can not be expected to make the distinctions and discriminations between similar terms used in history texts today.

Noah Webster, the lexicographer, claimed to have coined only one word — *demoralize,* which he defined: *"To corrupt or undermine the morals of; to destroy or lessen the effect of moral principles on; to render corrupt in morals."*

Today the field of lexicography has been *demoralized* by those who would make *"contemporary usage"* and *"slang"* a standard of reference for students in our schools. Pornographic terminology has come to have educational significance in state schools where *Dictionary of American Slang* has received academic acceptance.

Noah Webster recognized that each age is subject to the demoralization of its language by the *"literary"* or *"modish"* segment of society. Thus he put, as a check and balance upon each other, *universal undisputed practice* and the *common law of language,* or established principles of analogy. Change for the sake of change, vulgarity, cant, slang for its own sake, was to Webster like the principle of motion in physics — if not controlled it became the principle of destruction. Thus "expressions peculiar to, and generally understood only by, members of a particular sect, class, or occupation; as (a) the secret jargon of thieves, tramps, etc., (b) the special idiom of a profession or trade, or, (c) a mode of talking used merely out of convention; esp., the insincere use of pious phraseology" found no place in Noah Webster's dictionaries.

The responsibility to establish a standard of reference which will enable students to study the history and literature of our founding period in its original context is critical today. We need the "primary" Biblical, Christian and Constitutional meanings of words. Noah Webster spent a lifetime endeavoring to liberate America from European ties of "folly, corruption and tyranny." He sought to build an educational system in the school, the church and the home embodying "a love of virtue, patriotism and religion." In the Preface to his History of the United States he wrote:

"Republican government loses half its value, where the moral and social duties are imperfectly understood, or negligently practiced. To exterminate our popular vices is a work of far more importance to the character and happiness of our citizens, than any other improvements in our system of education."

NOAH WEBSTER

FOUNDING FATHER OF AMERICAN SCHOLARSHIP AND EDUCATION

"An immense effect may be produced by small powers wisely and steadily directed." Noah Webster, 1821

The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, served to announce to the world the separation of the American colonies from Great Britain, their establishment as "free and independent states," and their "firm reliance on the Protection of divine Providence." To this ringing declaration of faith in God was affixed the signatures of the 56 men who mutually pledged to "each other" the *property* of their "Lives" their "Fortunes" and their "sacred Honor." It took the seven long years of the American Revolution to "dissolve the Political Bands" which connected them to England, and six more years until the document detailing the Christian philosophy of American government took shape and form. But political separation alone would not suffice to keep the young republic on her Christian Constitutional course. If American liberty was to be complete all moorings with the old world must be cast off — especially those which might bind her to alien philosophies of government and hence to educational systems lending them support:

"This country must in some future time, be as distinguished by the superiority of her literary improvements, as she is already by the liberality of her civil and ecclesiastical constitutions. Europe is grown old in folly, corruption and tyranny — in that country laws are perverted, manners are licentious, literature is declining and human nature debased. For America in her infancy to adopt the present maxims of the old world, would be to stamp the wrinkles of decrepid age upon the bloom of youth and to plant the seeds of decay in a vigorous constitution. American glory begins to dawn at a favourable period, and under flattering circumstances. We have the experience of the whole world before our eyes; but to receive indiscriminately the maxims of government, the manners and the literary taste of Europe and make them the ground on which to build our systems in America, must soon convince us that a durable and stately edifice can never be erected upon the mouldering pillars of antiquity. It is the business of Americans to select the wisdom of all nations, as the basis of her constitutions, — to avoid their errours, — to prevent the introduction of foreign vices and corruptions and check the career of her own, — to promote virtue and patriotism, — to embellish and improve the sciences, — to diffuse an uniformity and purity of language, — to add superior dignity to this infant Empire and to human nature."

American Independence from European Manners

This statement was made by the young Noah Webster whose Master's thesis from Yale College was entitled, *Dissertation . . . upon the Universal diffusion of Literature, as introductory to the universal diffusion of Christianity.* "Literature" here has reference to education or, as Samuel Johnson defines it in his *A Dictionary of the English Language,* 1755, "learning, skill in letters." Noah

Webster's statement appears in the preface to that slender volume which, along with the Holy Bible, was to establish the uniqueness of American Education. For more than 100 years the American speller, known more familiarly as the *"blue-backed speller"* was to teach Americans *"skill in letters"* and the fundamentals concerning our Constitutional republic.

A great concern for "posterity" and for the youth of the country is evident among our founders. They recognized that the nature of our American Christian form of government demanded a quality of individual responsibility and a capacity for self-government never before required in any nation. An American education was, therefore, greatly needed to extend the new independence into every field of activity. Noah Webster, as did most Americans of his day, *"affirmed that the principles of republican government have their origin in the Scriptures,"* and he sought to build an educational system embodying *"a love of virtue, patriotism, and religion"*:

"In my view, the Christian religion is the *most important and one of the first things* in which *all* children, under a free government, ought to be instructed. . . . No truth is more evident to my mind than that the Christian religion must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people. . . . When I speak of the Christian religion as the basis of government, I do not mean an ecclesiastical establishment, a creed, or rites, forms, and ceremonies, or any compulsion of conscience. I mean primitive Christianity in its simplicity as taught by Christ and His apostles, consisting in a belief in the being, perfections, and moral government of God; in the revelation of His will to men, as their supreme rule of action; in man's accountability to God for his conduct in this life; and in the indispensable obligation of all men to yield entire obedience to God's commands in the moral law and in the Gospel. This belief and this practice may consist with different forms of church government, which, not being essential to Christianity, need not enter into any system of education."

Christian Religion Basis of American Government

The relationship of American government to Christianity is evident in the writings of the founding fathers of our republic and in the sermons preached by the American clergy. Thus, it is not surprising that men like Noah Webster were desirous of establishing an American system of education which would support the American Christian philosophy of government and extend the blessings of liberty to every individual. But Noah Webster's system of education included rather than excluded the influence of the American home:

"All government originates in families, and if neglected there, it will hardly exist in society. . . . The foundation of all free government and of all social order must be laid in families and in the discipline of youth. . . . The Education of youth, an employment of more consequence than making laws and preaching the gospel, because it lays the foundation on which both law and gospel rest for success. . . ."

Noah Webster's own childhood had been blessed with a Christian home. His Pilgrim heritage through Governor Bradford provided him with the ingredients of Christian self-government, responsibility and work habits which would serve him well throughout a long, active life. When the family farm was mortgaged to send him to Yale College he took this parental benediction with him:

"We wish to have you serve your generation and do good in the world and be useful and may so behave as to gain the esteem of all virtuous people that are acquainted with you and gain a comfortable subsistence, but especially that you may so live as to obtain the favor of Almighty God and His grace in this world and a saving interest in the merits of Jesus Christ, without which no man be happy."

From the first the public life of Noah Webster had a bearing on the course of the young republic. Supplementing his law practice through teaching, Noah Webster observed our dependence upon the maternal country for direction in education:

"However detestable personal pride may be, yet there is a national pride and a provincial, that are the noblest passions of the republican patriot. . . . For my own part, I frankly acknowledge, I have too much pride not to wish to see America assume a national character. I have too much pride to stand indebted to Great Britain for books to learn (sic) our children the letters of the alphabet. . . . America must be as independent in *literature* as she is in *politics,* as famous for *arts* as for *arms;* and it is not impossible but a person of my youth may have some influence in exciting a spirit of literary industry."

An Independent American Character

The youthful Noah Webster, then 25 years of age, continued to supply America for the next 60 years with this independence in literature. By dint of his own unflagging

industry he produced a repository of school texts unequalled for its consistency in teaching the precepts of American spelling, pronunciation and grammar, American history, civics, geography and literature. Throughout the innumerable revisions and republications the theme of American Christian morality and patriotism never wavered. Though Webster believed that the Bible should not be used extensively in the schools, as this tended to irreverence, he sprinkled its admonitions profusely throughout all his works. In his *Moral Catechism* he indicated clearly that there is no other basis upon which to base moral conduct: *"God's word, contained in the Bible, has furnished all necessary rules to direct our conduct."*

The publication of Noah Webster's *"Speller"* in 1783 was followed with a *"Grammar"* in 1784, and a *"Reader"* in 1785. These were Parts I, II, and III of *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language,* whose title was suggested by President Ezra Stiles of Yale College. These volumes republished again and again became the basis of an American system of education and their influence grew with the history of the young republic. Indeed, Noah Webster's *The American Spelling Book,* the famous *"blue-backed speller,"* set a publishing record unlikely to be equalled by any school text in America. Over a period of one hundred years more than *one hundred million* copies were worn out by Americans as they learned their letters, their morality and their patriotism, from north to south, from east to west. Noah Webster's *"Speller"* was compatible with the hearthside of a log cabin in the wilderness, it travelled on the flatboats of the Ohio, churned down the Mississippi and creaked across the prairies of the far west as pioneer mothers taught their children from covered wagons. Wherever an individual wished to challenge his own ignorance or quench his thirst for knowledge, there, along with the Holy Bible and Shakespeare, were Noah Webster's slim and inexpensive Spellers, Grammars, Readers, and his *Elements of Useful Knowledge* containing the history and geography of the United States. Indeed if his Biblical name should have any significance to America it might be said that Noah's books were an *ark* in which the American Christian spirit rode the deluge of rising anti-Christian and anti-republican waters which threatened so often to inundate the nation.

Noah Webster's American System of Education

The first such tide came during the 1790's when apostles of the French Revolution, at home and abroad, imported a subversive doctrine to these shores. In a series of historical and political articles published in his *American Minerva Magazine,* Noah Webster endeavored to educate the American public to the dangers inherent in Jacobinism:

"I consider as a matter of infinite consequence the cautious admission of foreigners to the rights of citizenship. Numbers of them who have within the past year arrived and settled in this city come with violent prejudices against arbitrary government, and they seem to make no great distinction between arbitrary government and a government of laws founded on free elections. Many of them are warm democrats; and the Emigration Society here is headed by Democrats of our own — in short the opposers of our government are literally wriggling themselves into all sorts of company to carry their points. One main article of their policy is to attach foreigners to their principles the moment of their landing. If that system of creating a popular interest extraneous from the legislature to influence their proceedings — that system of raising a multitude of isolated private clubs over the nation as its guardian — should spread thro the country, we may bid adieu to our Constitution. Our safety is in the country people, who more scattered and more independent, are out of the reach of demagogues."

Secret Influence of Jacobinism

An exchange of letters with Joseph Priestley in 1800 takes that eminent British scientist severely to task for living in the United States and deliberately propagating a subversive doctrine:

"Sir, In your second letter, pages 8 and 9, you define *democracy* with a view to explain away the odious sense annexed to the word *Democrat.* You call the Constitution of this country a *democracy,* and every man who is not a *Democrat,* an enemy to this Constitution. But whatever you may call the true meaning of these words, the practice of our country has annexed to them and established a different signification. By *democracy* is intended a government where the legislative powers are exercised directly by all the citizens, as formerly in Athens and Rome. In our country this power is not in the hands of the people but of their representatives. The powers of the people are principally restricted to the direct exercise of the rights of suffrage. Hence a material distinction between our form of government and those of the ancient democracies. Our form of government has acquired the appellation of a *Republic,*

Distinction Between a Democracy and a Republic

by way of distinction, or rather of a *representative Republic.*

"Hence the word *Democrat* has been used as synonymous with the word *Jacobin* in France; and by an additional idea, which arose from the attempt to control our government by private popular associations, the word has come to signify a person who attempts an undue opposition to or influence over our government by means of private clubs, secret intrigues, or by public popular meetings which are extraneous to the constitution. By *Republicans* we understand the friends of our Representative Governments, who believe that no influence whatever should be exercised in a state which is not directly authorized by the Constitution and laws."

It is significant that many of the founding fathers recognized the relationship between education and the success of the American philosophy of government. Republican principles under the new Constitution received tremendous support from Noah Webster's *A Federal Catechism.* It was the first introduction of civics into the curriculum appearing in a 1794 edition of *The American Spelling Book. A Federal Catechism* contained "a short explanation of the Constitution of the United States of America, and the Principles of Government." Among those subjects specifically taught was a discussion of the "defects of democracy" and a definition of a "better form of government," namely, that of a "representative republic." Students learned distinctly that the United States is "a federal representative republic," and that the "states are all governed by constitutions that fall under the name of representative republics."

Noah Webster, who once stated that his political philosophy had been learned *"in the school of Washington and of the great and worthy men who assisted in obtaining Independence, and in the formation and organization of the government,"* was eminently qualified to teach the principles of the American Constitution. It was he who had first publically promoted the idea of a constitutional convention as he travelled from New Hampshire to North Carolina during the years 1785–1787. His 48-page pamphlet entitled *Sketches of American Policy,* was carried to Mount Vernon in 1785 for George Washington's perusal. During the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia the 29-year old school master was visited by many of the most outstanding delegates. Webster's Diary records visits with George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, Rufus King, Abraham Baldwin, Edmund Randolph, William Samuel Johnson, Oliver Ellsworth, Roger Sherman, William Livingston and John Marshall.

George Washington's School of Political Philosophy

Two days before the Convention adjourned Thomas Fitzsimmons, a delegate from Pennsylvania, wrote Noah Webster requesting him to prepare an essay in support of the now completed document. The request came on September 1st, it was written on October 9th and published October 17th. Containing 55 pages it was dedicated to Benjamin Franklin. Dr. David Ramsay wrote from Charlestown: *"I have read it with pleasure, and it is now in brisk circulation among my friends. I have heard every person who has read it express his high approbation of its contents. It will doubtless be of singular service in recommending the adoption of the new Constitution."*

Although admittedly by Webster "a hasty production," nevertheless, *An examination into the leading principles of the Federal Constitution proposed by the late Convention held at Philadelphia, with Answers to the principal objections that have been raised against the system. By a citizen of America,* served to crystallize many of the major arguments. In his discussion of principles Webster touched upon that of *property* and its relationship to the "whole basis of national freedom":

"The liberty of the press, trial by jury, the Habeas Corpus writ, even Magna Charta itself, although justly deemed the palladia of freedom, are all inferior considerations, when compared with a general distribution of real property among every class of people. The power of entailing estates is more dangerous to liberty and republican government than all the constitutions that can be written on paper, or even than a standing army. Let the people have property and they will have power — a power that will forever be exerted to prevent a restriction of the press, and abolition of trial by jury, or the abridgement of any other privilege. The liberties of America, therefore, and her forms of government, stand on the broadest basis. . . ."

Property the Basis of American Liberty

The American clergy had for one hundred years prior to the American Revolution preached on the subject of property — its Biblical basis and responsibility. They often quoted John Locke's writings on "civil government." In his discussion of property he identifies man, in Paul's words, as the property of God and the earth, as indicated in Genesis, as God's capital gift to man for the investment of his labors in

John Locke on the Preservation of Property

response to Scriptural admonition. Locke's most oft repeated phrase in Colonial Constitutional literature was "The great and chief End therefore, of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, is the *Preservation of their Property.*"

James Madison, known as "the Father of the Constitution" in reiterating the purpose of government as instituted to "protect property of every sort" indicates its Christian base when he states that "Conscience is the most sacred of all property." Noah Webster, also, considered the "preservation of property" a key to individual liberty under the American Constitutional system. His first efforts to preserve the fruits of his labors came during those years when he travelled to each of the colonial legislatures to secure copyright protection for his blue-backed speller. For more than fifty years Noah Webster worked to achieve the protection of *"authors of useful inventions"* for he considered that *"the production of genius and the imagination are if possible more really and exclusively property than houses and lands, and are equally entitled to legal security."* His untiring efforts were instrumental in bringing about the passage of copyright legislation first at the state level and finally at the national level. Noah Webster's foresight in securing his *"literary property"* stood him in good stead during the long lean years of labor on the monumental *American Dictionary*. It was the slim speller which constituted the main support of the Webster family while its founder explored, studied and compared language from a Scriptural position. The importance of land ownership meant much to him and he regarded it as the foundation of a republican government:

Webster Secures his Literary Property through Copyright

"I am a farmer's son, & have collected all the small portion of property which I possess, by untiring efforts & labor to promote the literary improvement of my fellow citizens, & to establish the freedom & tranquillity of my country."

Property and productivity are related to character, and Christian character was the basis of Noah Webster's educational system. His famous *Grammatical Institute* contained the Scriptural admonition: *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."* His Spellers, Grammars, Readers, Histories and Dictionaries all implemented this thesis. The examples, illustrations and definitions used in his volumes were replete with ideals of virtue and industry, of piety and patriotism. But it was Noah Webster, himself, who best exemplified the character of the young republic and who illustrated the *"immense effect"* produced by one individual *"wisely and steadily directed."* The discipline of work learned during the early years on his father's farm, coupled with his tremendous capacity to complete the many projects initiated, enabled Noah Webster to work effectively in many fields. He was always productive with his time and talents, whether recording scientific data on weather and temperature, collecting statistics on disease and epidemics, counting the houses in the cities and towns visited in his travels, studying population trends and voting records, or writing informatively on many questions of concern. Like most of the founding father generation, Noah Webster was interested in everything. His writings cover an unbelievable range of topics: religious, political, educational, musical, economic, commercial, medical, social and scientific. Rarely was Noah Webster afforded a platform from which to voice his convictions. He created his own forums for stating his positions, not only through his books, addresses, articles, and letters, but through the establishment of publications such as *The American Magazine* in 1787, and the *American Minerva* in 1793. From the vantage point of his periodicals and newspapers, Noah Webster challenged the political opponents of constitutionalism and constructed a visible structure of Americanism furnishing an historical interpretation of current events and advocating many measures of civic betterment to improve the quality of living.

The Private Enterprise of Noah Webster

While never occupying an elective position above the state level the influence of his published opinions can be calculated by the quality and quantity of his opposition and the untiring efforts to discredit and to silence him. Throughout the years he supplied consistent support to the administration of George Washington. In 1793 the *Address from the Inhabitants of Hartford to the President of the United States* written with John Trumbull and Chauncey Goodrich, afforded President Washington with a public statement of calm and fearless support rising above the popular hysteria:

Webster Supports Washington's Administration

"Warmly attached to our government, both by interest and affection, we take the liberty to assure you, that we shall ever stand ready by our utmost exertions, in every legal and constitutional way, to support the just measures of your administration; and to lend our assistance in

maintaining the peace and harmony of the States, and in opposing the insidious designs of those persons, if there be any so deluded, who may wish to subject the country to foreign influence, and involve it in the horrors of war."

Again, in 1795 when the proposed Jay Treaty was being used by Jefferson's Democratic Clubs as an attack upon Washington, Noah Webster joined his efforts to those of James Kent and Alexander Hamilton. Under the name of "Curtius" Noah Webster's twelve essays *"operated more powerfully than any other publication in calming the public mind and restoring confidence in the administration."*

Noah Webster was notable for his challenges and he was often labelled controversial and contentious. But if he demolished a structure by his attacks he labored diligently to raise another and a better one in its place. He *"chearfully"* threw his mite into *"the common treasure of patriotic exertions."* Despite his active participation in the educational, political and scientific life of the nation his own family life exemplified what love and discipline centered in Christ could accomplish in forming the character of the next generation. His six daughters and one son enjoyed both his tender solicitude for their intellectual development as well as his superintending guidance of their spiritual growth. Concerning the education of women he valued an American education — fitting them for their decisive role in a republic in the discipline and education of youth in the family. *"Their own education should therefore enable them to implant in the tender mind, such sentiments of virtue, propriety and dignity, as are suited to the freedom of our governments."*

Noah Webster's Christian Family

A unique feature of America has been the position of womanhood brought to her full flowering through Christianity. As understood by the founding generations the American woman was to stand beside her husband with a role equally important to the republic though not identical with that of a man. This American Christian concept of womanhood Noah Webster continued to teach through his educational system and *The American Spelling Book* of 1843 contained a section entitled *Precepts Concerning Social Relations* in which are described qualities which a young man should identify in his future life partner:

"But when thou findest sensibility of heart joined with softness of manners; an accomplished mind and religion, united with sweetness of temper, modest deportment, and a love of domestic life — Such is the woman who will divide the sorrows, and double the joys of thy life. Take her to thyself; she is worthy to be thy nearest friend, thy companion, the wife of thy bosom."

Noah Webster's marriage to Rebecca Greenleaf of French Huguenot descent provided him with a domestic center of power from which to sally forth in his encounters with a world of conflicting ideas and ideals. Noah Webster's *Diary* records in 1790 the first year of a happy, successful marriage, one which was to ripen to more than a golden half century.

Marriage and "a Flitch of Bacon"

Noah and Rebecca had gently wagered *"one flitch of bacon"* to be paid to her if their first year of marriage should contain any untoward words of quarrelling. *"Anniversary of our marriage, one year past & no quarreling, of course the Flitch of bacon is won. . . ."*

The greatest test of family support of Noah Webster's long career of establishing American scholarship and education came during that period when he was devoting the major portion of his talents to producing the first truly American dictionary of the English language. Noah Webster's recognition of the importance of the American language to American government dated from his early declarations of the need for American literary independence from England. His challenge to English grammarians in the *Grammatical Institute* of 1783, 1784, 1785, brought him into confrontation with the many theories of orthography, pronunciation, definition and grammar. In an effort to interest others in the need for more scholarly research into the etymology of language, Noah Webster was instrumental in establishing the Philological Society in 1788, *"founded for the particular purpose of ascertaining and improving the American tongue."* It was the first society of its kind on the continent. When, in the same year, the title of *The Institute* was changed to *The American Spelling Book,* he stated that future editions *"must be copied from the last edition, which is corrected by the Philological Society & recommended as the elements of a* federal *language. . . ."*

On June 4, 1800, the following announcement appeared in the New Haven newspapers:

"Mr. Webster of this city, we understand, is engaged in completing the system for the instruction of youth, which he began in the year 1783. He has in hand a Dictionary of the American Language, a work long since projected, but which other occupations have delayed till this time.

The plan contemplated extends to a small Dictionary for schools, one for the counting-house, and a large one for men of science. The first is nearly ready for the press — the second and third will require the labor of some years.

"It is found that a work of this kind is absolutely necessary on account of considerable differences between the American and English language. New circumstances, new modes of life, new laws, new ideas of various kinds give rise to new words, and have already made many material differences between the language of England and America. Some new words are introduced in America, and many more new significations are annexed to words, which it is necessary to explain. It is probable that the alternations in the tenures of land and the ecclesiastical polity, will dismiss from the language in America several hundred words which belong in the English. The differences in the language of the two countries will continue to multiply, and render it necessary that we should have *Dictionaries* of the *American* language."

Once again the keynote of Webster's plan began with the identification of an *American* language as distinct from that of England. With the publication in 1806 of *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* Noah Webster began to lay the foundation of his own American Dictionary. The *Compendious Dictionary* built upon and expanded the work of an English schoolmaster, John Entick, who had published *The New Spelling Dictionary* in 1784. It was not, however, just the addition of 5,000 new words to Entick's original 32,000 which represented Noah Webster's significant contributions to the field of lexicography. His twenty years of philological studies, his mastery of more than ten languages by 1806, his conviction that earlier students had *"mistaken many of the fundamentals of language,"* provided him with the ammunition for a cannonade levelled chiefly at the most respected name in English language — Dr. Samuel Johnson. The effrontery of such an attack by an American caused Harvard College to reject the plan of Yalesman, Noah Webster. But the faculties of Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth, Williams and Middlebury Colleges gave *"unqualified approbation of the design."*

Webster's *Compendious Dictionary*

Noah Webster's thesis had first been articulated in 1785 as he toured the colonies lecturing on the English language. Later, with some additions, he published in 1789 his *Dissertations on the English Language* which led him into his profound study of etymology and philology and caused him ultimately to master more than 26 languages. Essentially Noah Webster never deviated from his original premise:

Dissertations on the English Language

"As an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government. Great Britain, whose children we are, and whose language we speak, should no longer be our standard; for the taste of her writers is already corrupted, and her language on the decline. But if it were not so, she is at too great a distance to be our model, and to instruct us in the principles of our own tongue.

"It must be considered further, that English is the common root or stock from which our national language will be derived. All others will gradually waste away — and within a century and a half, North America will be peopled with a hundred millions of men, *all speaking the same language*. . . .

"Whether the inhabitants of America can be brought to a perfect uniformity in the pronunciation of words, it is not easy to predict; but it is certain that no attempt of the kind has been made, and an experiment, begun and pursued on the right principles, is the only way to decide the question. . . .

"The two points therefore, which I conceive to be the basis of a standard in speaking, are these; *universal undisputed practice*, and the *principle of analogy*. *Universal practice* is generally, perhaps always, a rule of propriety; and in disputed points where people differ in opinion and practice, *analogy*, should always decide the controversy.

"These are authorities to which all men will submit — they are superior to the opinions and caprices of the great, and to the negligence and ignorance of the multitude. The authority of individuals is always liable to be called in question — but the unanimous consent of a nation, and a fixed principle interwoven with the very construction of a language, coeval and co-extensive with it, are like the common laws of a land, or the immutable rules of morality, the propriety of which every man, however refractory, is forced to acknowledge, and to which most men will readily submit. Fashion is usually the child of caprice and the being of a day, principles of propriety are founded in the very nature of things, and remain unmoved and unchanged, amidst all the fluctuations of human affairs and the revolutions of time. . . ."

Noah Webster set forth in the 18th century a structure containing the balance of two forces in language — forces with which many scholars have struggled: *change* and

changelessness. While admitting that *"standard usage"* was the outgrowth of *"current speech,"* and that *"languages are changing, from age to age, in proportion to improvements in science,"* Noah Webster recognized that language contained both the *centrifugal* and the *centripetal* forces *working together. "These changes are the necessary consequences of changes in customs, the introduction of new arts, and new ideas in the sciences. Still the body of a language and its general rules remain for ages the same, and the new words usually conform to these rules; otherwise they stand as exceptions, which are not to overthrow the principle of analogy already established."* Change and innovation were sources of enrichment and vitalization of a language — but not its chief impetus. "It is nearly the same here as in physics, where motion, the source of life, becomes the principle of destruction." Change for the sake of change was not countenanced by Noah Webster:

The Two Forces in Language in Check and Balance

"The language is composed of a variety of materials, and it requires some labor to adjust the parts and reduce them to order.

"To accomplish this purpose, we must search for such principles of analogy as still exist in its construction, and make them the pillars of a regular system. Where such principles cannot be found, let us examine the opinions of the learned, and the practice of the nations which speak the pure English, that we may determine by weight of authority, the *common law* of language, those questions which do not come within any established rules."

In his preface to the *Compendious Dictionary,* Noah Webster set forth his proposals for a gradual reform of spelling, and an Americanization of pronunciation, including the addition of some words unique to Americans. He was also concerned with the re-definition of words to rescue them from a purely literary or pedantic meaning.

In spelling the changes proposed by Noah Webster in 1807, with few exceptions, have been retained and preferred by Americans. These include the rejection of the final *k* in works like *musick,* the dropping of the *u* in *honour* and similar words, the use of *er* in the endings for all words whether *re* or *er* in the original language such as *theater, luster* and others.

Noah Webster believed that *"the New England style"* of pronunciation was preferred by Americans rather than the affected elegance of the English theater. His main criticism of the Johnsonian school of pronunciation was that it was not drawn from *"standard usage"* but that it favored *"the practice of the gay and fashionable world."* He set himself in opposition to *"authors and writers pretending to purify and refine the language."* It was not the people who corrupted the language but, rather, the literary and *"modish"* segment of society who attempted to put into permanent circulation *"temporary," "capricious,"* and *"gross improprieties."* Noah Webster was convinced that the perversion of language by the *literati* would be offset by the *"yeomanry"* in daily usage. The *"yeomanry,"* or common man of America to whom Noah Webster referred, reflected a fundamental distinction based upon the American form of government. On this continent the *"common man"* was the *"uncommon man":*

The Corruption of Language by Authors and Writers

"Let Englishmen notice that when I speak of American yeomanry, the latter are not to be compared to the illiterate peasantry of their own country. The Yeomanry of this country consists of substantial independent freeholders, masters of their own persons and Lords of their own soil. These men have considerable education. They not only learn to read, write and keep accounts; but a vast proportion of them read newspapers every week, and besides the Bible, which is found in all families, they read the best English sermons and treatises upon religion, ethics, geography and history. . . . The people of distant counties in England can hardly understand one another, so various are their dialects; but in the exent of twelve hundred miles in America, there are very few, I question whether a hundred words, except such as are used in employments wholly local, which are not universally intelligible."

While Webster believed that *"general custom"* and *"standard usage"* contributed to producing a national uniformity in language, the *"higher tribunal"* was to be found in the best of written language:

"Hence from the practice of the gay and fashionable world, there is always an appeal to a higher tribunal, the great body of literary and well informed men in a nation, whose opinion of propriety is not to be seduced, nor their judgement perverted by the influence of names and fashion."

In the first reader he produced for use in the schools, *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking,* Noah Webster included many patriotic selections taken from the speeches, addresses and writings of Washington,

Hancock, and others, as well as the Declaration of Independence, Addresses from Congress, and poems and epics written to celebrate American events. These were *Calculated to improve the Minds and refine the Taste of Youth. And also to instruct them in Geography, History, and Politics of the United States. To Which is prefixed, Rules in Elocution, and Directions for expressing the principal Passions of the Mind.*

The *Compendious Dictionary* had one Websterian touch which was to have a definite influence on the construction of future dictionaries. For the first time material of an encyclopedic nature was included: tables of moneys, of weights and measures, the divisions of times among all nations, an official list of post-offices in the United States and the values of exports as well as *"new and interesting chronological tables of remarkable events and discoveries."* Webster characterized the American trait of being interested in everything, a feature which is reflected in the great variety of almanacs, digests and encyclopedia published every year in the United States.

Encyclopedic Information in Webster's Dictionary

The *Compendious Dictionary* was modestly priced for $1.50 and the following year, 1807, Noah Webster produced an abridgment for $1.00 *"compiled for the use of common schools in the United States."* Neither of these dictionaries yielded the income which he hoped to derive while at work on the larger *American Dictionary*. It was not until 1817 that a new edition of this work could find a market. But the important point had been established — Noah Webster had demonstrated that a volume of such authority and importance as a dictionary could be priced so that the average American could own his own copy.

In 1807 Noah Webster endeavored to gain some financial support for his projected *American Dictionary*. He addressed a circular entitled *To the Friends of Literature in the United States* to men in various towns and cities, requesting that they give the circulars wide circulation. Not much encouragement was forthcoming and a sum of barely one thousand dollars obtained, some of which Webster paid back as he could. He had long deplored the lack of interest in the study of the American language and had hoped that his circulars discussing his work and plans might attract scholars with whom he could exchange his findings. As his old classmate, Oliver Wolcott expressed it *"we have able, generous & learned Men, but they want wealth. The Men of wealth are in various ways taxed for very considerable sums, but they have not the faculty of discriminating the most suitable objects of encouragement."*

Men of Wealth Lacking Discrimination

Among those men of generosity and discrimination was John Jay who gave both support and encouragement to Noah Webster:

"It is not improbable that doubts prevail respecting the design and tendency of the work you have on hand. The literary productions of Great Britain and America being interesting to each other, many are of opinion (and I concur in it) that the English language and its orthography should be the same in both countries.

"Apprehensions have been entertained that your dictionary would tend to impair that sameness, and those apprehensions may to an uncertain degree, have had an unfavorable influence.

"The progress of the subscription having been so long suspended, I think it better to enclose what I intended to subscribe than trouble your agents at New York with it.

"If any plan to render your prospects more promising, and in my power to promote should be adopted, be pleased to communicate it to me."

But, as is so often the case in the lives of dedicated men and women, just at the moment when human help seems to be exhausted God moves into the picture. During the winter of 1807 an event occurred which would forever after provide Noah Webster with that peace and security which the world can neither give nor take away. His own words written to Judge Thomas Dawes, brother-in-law, best describe the significance of that winter:

"For a number of years just past I have been more and more impressed with the importance of regulating my conduct by the precepts of Christianity. Of the being and attributes of God I have never entertained a doubt, and my studies as well as frequent contemplations on the works of nature have led my mind to most sublime views of His character and perfections. . . .

"Still I had doubts respecting some of the doctrines of the Christian faith, such as regeneration, election, salvation by free grace, the atonement, and the divinity of Christ; these doubts served as an apology for my forebearing to make a profession of religion; for though I could never read or hear that solemn declaration of our Savior, *'Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess*

Noah Webster's Confession of Jesus Christ as Saviour

before my Father who is in heaven,' without some compunction and alarm; yet I endeavored to justify my neglect by a persuasion that I could not conscientiously assent to the usual confession required in Calvinistic churches as the condition of admission to their communion. That is, in plain terms, I sheltered myself as well as I could from the attacks of conscience for neglect of duty under a species of scepticism, and endeavored to satisfy my mind that a profession of religion is not absolutely necessary to salvation. In this state of mind I placed great reliance on good works or the performance of moral duties as the means of salvation, although I cannot affirm that I wholly abandoned all dependence on the merits of a Redeemer. You may easily suppose that in this state of distraction and indecision of opinions I neglected many duties of piety.

"About a year ago an unusual revival of religion took place in New Haven, and frequent conferences of private meetings for religious purposes were held by pious and well disposed persons in the Congregational societies. I felt some opposition to these meetings, being apprehensive that they would, by affecting the passions too strongly, introduce an enthusiasm or fanaticism which might be considered as real religion. I expressed these fears to some friends and particularly to my family, inculcating on them the importance of a *rational religion* and the danger of being misled by the passions.

"My wife, however, was friendly to these meetings and she was joined by two eldest daughters who were among the first subjects of serious impressions. I did not forbid but rather discouraged their attendance on conferences. . . .

"These impressions I attempted to remove by reasoning with myself and endeavoring to quiet my mind by a persuasion that my opposition to my family and the awakening was not a real opposition to *rational religion* but to enthusiasm or *false religion.* I continued some weeks in this situation, utterly unable to quiet my own mind and without resorting to the only source of peace and consolation. The impressions, however, grew stronger till at length I could not pursue my studies without frequent interruptions. My mind was suddenly arrested, without any previous circumstance of the time to draw it to this subject and, as it were, fastened to the awakening and upon my own conduct. I closed my books, yielded to the influence which could not be resisted or mistaken, and was led by a spontaneous impulse to repentence, prayer, and entire submission and surrender of myself to my Maker and Redeemer. My submission appeared to be cheerful, and was soon followed by that peace of mind which the world can neither give nor take away.

Noah Webster Accepts Salvation by Redemption

"This, my dear friend, is a short but faithful narration of facts. That these impressions were not the effect of any of my own passions nor of enthusiasm is to me evident, for I was in complete possession of all my rational powers, and that the influence was supernatural is evident from this circumstance; it was not only independent of all volition but opposed to it. You will readily suppose that after such evidence of the direct operation of the divine spirit upon the human heart, I could no longer question or have a doubt respecting the Calvinistic and Christian doctrines of regeneration, of free grace, and of the sovereignty of God. I now began to understand and relish many parts of the scriptures, which before appeared mysterious and unintelligible or repugnant to my natural pride. For instance, I was remarkably struck with the 26th verse of John 14th: *'But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you'* — a passage which I had often read without realizing its import. In short, my view of the scriptures, of religion, of the whole Christian scheme of salvation, and of God's moral government are very much changed, and my heart yields with delight and confidence to whatever appears to be the divine will.

"Permit me here to remark, in allusion to a passage in your letter, that I had for almost fifty years exercised my talents such as they are, to obtain knowledge and to abide by its dictates, but without arriving at the truth, or what now appears to me to be the truth, of the gospel. I am taught now the utter insufficiency of our own powers to effect a change of the heart, and am persuaded that a reliance on our own talents or powers is a fatal error, springing from natural pride and opposition to God, by which multitudes of men, especially of the more intelligent and moral part of society are deluded into ruin. I now look, my dear friend, with regret on the largest portion of the ordinary life of man, spent *'without hope and without God in the world.'* I am particularly affected by a sense of my ingratitude to that Being who made me and without whose constant agency I cannot draw a breath, who has showered upon me a profusion of temporal blessings and provided a Savior for my immortal soul. . . .

Former Pride and Opposition to God

"In the month of April last I made a profession of faith; in this most solemn and affecting of all transactions of my life I was accompanied with my two eldest daughters; while I felt a degree of compunction that I had not sooner dedicated myself to God, it was with heartfelt delight I could present myself before my Maker and say, 'Here am I, with the children which thou hast given me.'

"Mrs. Webster was confined at the time and could not be a witness of this scene, so interesting to her as well as to us who were personally concerned, but you may easily conceive how much she was affected the first time she met her husband and children at the Communion. . . ."

Noah Webster's confession of faith became the basis of an evangelistic tract entitled *The Peculiar Doctrines of the Gospel, Explained and Defended.* It was well received by the Trinitarian clergy, among whom was Abiel Holmes, father of Oliver Wendell Holmes:

"We have been much gratified in the perusal of your Letter in explanation and defence of the 'Peculiar Doctrines of the Gospel.' I hope the publication of it will promote the interests of pure Christianity. Arguments used by *us,* who are *set for the defence of the gospel,* are often inefficacious, because we are considered as merely 'labouring in our vocation.' When men of learning and talents, in other professions, voluntarily engage in the defence of our holy religion, the world is less apt to suppose them *interested,* and therefore more ready to listen to their arguments. I rejoice to find you defending, not the outworks merely, but the citadel; not the truth of Christianity in general, but the peculiar doctrines of it — *the truth as it is in Jesus.*"

Noah Webster's Defence of the Gospel

The widespread circulation of Webster's religious convictions brought forth the venom of Unitarian Harvard and Boston who attacked not the Christian but the philologist in the hope of discountenancing the *Compendious Dictionary.* Moses Stuart, now a professor at Andover wrote:

"The *Anthology* is outrageous against you. I believe it will do good, and promote the very cause it is meant to destroy. May the Lord turn their haughty and unfriendly designs into foolishness! Be assured, the object of their vengance is more against your religion than against you."

In 1811 Noah Webster moved his family of six daughters and one son from busy New Haven to Amherst, a rural community outside of Northampton, Massachusetts. Webster needed to conserve his slim resources and he wished to devote more time to the completion of his major work the *American Dictionary.*

"Our new home on one side of the Amherst Green, as it was called, was a very pleasant home and my dear Father seemed to love it" *wrote Julia, who later married the young Chauncey A. Goodrich.* "He went there to lessen the expenses, and to live a more uninterrupted life, while pursuing his great work the Dictionary. His habits were very regular. He rose early in the morning and went to his study, a room in front of the house filled with books, and the view from the front window commanded the hill on which now stand the Buildings of the College, which he helped to found. . . . The view was most enchanting. Mount Tom and Mount Holyoke and the Valley of the Connecticut by their base and Hadley and Northampton. The scene was inspiring and the thought of God as a *real* Father crept into my soul there always. I think Father went to his study for prayer as soon as he was dressed. In about half an hour he would pass the rooms of us children and say, 'Up, up, children!' We never lingered after that call like the youth of more modern days. We assembled for prayer in the common parlor, and Father read the Scriptures, and then from a little book of his own composing he offered prayer."

The Webster Home in Amherst, Massachusetts

Noah Webster, to whom the cultivation of the soil was a delight and a resource, employed the ten acres of meadowland surrounding the house agriculturally. He set out an orchard and grafted the finest kinds of apples and pears he could find, growing peaches and cherries from the stones. His large, sweet white grapes, raised from a fine native vine taken out of his father's farm in West Hartford, were known as *"the Webster vine."* His flowers and the vegetable garden also flourished and prospered and he could say reverently *"for some years past I have rarely cast my eyes to heaven or plucked the fruit of my garden without feeling emotions of gratitude and adoration.*

Webster called the people of Amherst and Old Hampshire County *"as respectable and patriotic republicans as ever trod the soil of a free country."* Despite his best intentions to confine himself to his Dictionary he soon found that with characteristic ardor, interest and sympathy, his considerable talents were called into active community service. His experiments in agriculture were contributed to the *Hampshire Gazette* and here he found a further

platform for his 20-year interest in forest conservation. The nine Websters made a considerable impact upon the First Church and soon he and the three eldest daughters had organized a choir and were active in soul winning during revivals. In addition he organized a Sunday School and was often called upon to moderate in church affairs. Naturally, the Webster home was a focal point for visiting ministers.

Political interests had caused him to play a small part in the matter of the Hartford Convention from the sidelines. But, even as he had been in Connecticut for nine sessions a member of the General Assembly (1800–1807), councilman of New Haven (1799–1804), alderman (1806–1809) and Judge of the County Court (1806–1810), now he stood for the Massachusetts Legislature where he served as a Member of the General Court in 1814, 1815, and 1817. In Amherst he also served as selectman of the town. Two more of his local activities were his directorship of the Hampshire Bible Society, and his vice-presidency of the Hampshire and Hampden Agricultural Society.

Elective Offices Held by Noah Webster

While articulate on many subjects Webster's focus lay in education and its importance to the republic. In the Massachusett's House of Representatives he endeavored to secure for Massachusetts a permanent school fund similar to that of Connecticut:

"I should rejoice to see a system adopted that should lay a foundation for a permanent fund for public schools, and to have more pains taken to discipline our youth in early life in sound maxims of moral, political, and religious duties."

Local interest in the schools produced his ardent support of the founding of Amherst Academy. While he could not give financially, it was his tenacity and persistence which secured the Act of Incorporation in 1816. In 1817 Noah Webster was again asked to lend his enthusiasm and influence in obtaining both the funds and the support for a college. Calvinists had become alarmed at the growth of Unitarian doctrines taught at Harvard and they determined to establish a college which should propagate the principles of the Gospel. *"The gospel only can convert swords into plough shares and spears into pruning hooks — the gospel only can supersede the necessity of bolts and bars — the gospel only can dispeople the state prison and the penetentiary."* When the venture was successfully established Webster, with characteristic thoroughness, resigned as President of the Board of Trustees and once more endeavored to seclude himself with the Dictionary.

Noah Webster, Founder of Amherst College, 1821

Although occupied with civic and educational concerns Webster had not neglected his exhaustive philological research. In 1817 his ten-year study of twenty languages was complete in manuscript form ready to challenge both English and German studies in comparative linguistics. A letter to John Jay explains why he felt this necessary:

"When I began the compilation of a large Dictionary of the English Language, I limited my views chiefly to a correction of such errors as had escaped former compilers and the supply of such new terms as have sprung from modern improvements in science. But in searching for the originals of English words, I soon found the field of etymology had been very imperfectly explored: and one discovery succeeding another, my curiosity was excited to persevere in the pursuit. At length finding no safe clue to conduct me through the labyrinth, I adopted a new plan of investigation, that of examining and comparing the primary elements, articulations or consonants of words in 20 different languages or dialects, the vowels having been found so mutable as to be of no use. The result of this examination has been the formation of a synopsis of radical words in more than 20 languages which is complete or nearly so. This will probably form a Quarto, and be an appendix to the Dictionary. This has occupied about ten years, but I do not, and I think the world will not regret the delay which this has occasioned, for if I am not deceived, the discoveries, proceeding from this investigation will be quite important, and as *new* in Europe as in America. This synopsis exhibits a vast number of affinities between the languages examined, which have never before been detected; but what I think of more value, this investigation has developed in a multitude of words, the primary sense of the root, which has not hitherto been known. . . ."

Synopsis of Words in Twenty Languages

In 1807 Webster had mastered twelve languages. By 1813 he had learned twenty different languages, these were: Chaldaic, Syriac, Arabic, Samaritan, Hebrew, Ethiopic, Persian, Irish (Hyberne, Celtic), Amoric, Anglo-Saxon, German, Dutch, Swedish, Danish, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, Russian, later adding Portuguese, Welsh, Gothic, and the early dialects of English and German. English, of course, was included in this list.

"In the second story of his new home, in a large room,

with windows looking to the south and east, Webster set up anew the large circular table which he had used for some years at New Haven," *so wrote his granddaughter, Emily Ellsworth Fowler Ford.* "This table was about two feet wide, built in the form of a hollow circle. Dictionaries and grammars of all obtainable languages were laid in successive order upon its surface. Webster would take the word under investigation, and standing at the right end of the lexicographer's table, look it up in the first dictionary which lay at that end. He made a note, examined a grammar, considered some kindred word, and then passed to the next dictionary of some other tongue. He took each word through the twenty or thirty dictionaries, making notes of his discoveries, and passing around his table many times in the course of a day's labor of minute and careful study. This was comparative philology which has given such great results to modern philologists."

Webster's Lexicographer's Table

In 1822 the Websters were able to move back to New Haven, closer to the intellectual world and closer to his two married daughters, Mrs. William Wolcott Ellsworth, and Mrs. Chauncey A. Goodrich. In 1823 Yale College recognized her eminent son with an honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. Now approaching the last lap of his extensive work on the *American Dictionary* Noah Webster wished to exhaust one last avenue of research — the libraries of France and England. Refusing to jeopardize or put in hazard the family property he sought once again for funds to underwrite his research. The response came — from within the closeknit family circle:

"If one thousand dollars will assist in affording aid to my dearest Father in his contemplated Journey to England, he is at liberty to draw this sum in the name of his daughter, with the hope that should he succeed in his wishes, he may at some future time be able to repay it. But if otherwise and Providence should see fit that *disappointment* should be the result of the undertaking, then let this sum be considered as the *free* and cheerful gift of an affectionate child. Harriet."

Harriet's Gift to Her Father

Accompanied by his son William, Noah Webster set sail for France where the sight of row upon row of books in the Royal Library, more books than in all the colleges of America, overwhelmed the Pilgrim from Connecticut. His letters to *"My dear Bacca"* and to his daughters were full of bright pertinent detail about French customs and cookery and he impatiently awaited the chatty, newsy letters from home. England, however, was his real goal scholastically and he had written Samuel Lee, Professor of Arabic at Cambridge University:

"Reverend and Dear Sir,

"As I have crossed the Atlantic for the purpose of completing and publishing a dictionary of our language, it would be very gratifying to me and to my countrymen, and I think by no means useless in England, to settle, by the united opinions of learned men, some points in pronunciation, orthography, and construction, in which the practice of good writers and speakers is not uniform, either in England or in the United States; and it is desirable that as far as the people have the same things and the same ideas, the words to express them should remain the same. . . .

"Besides this, the English language is to be the instrument of propagating sciences, arts, and the Christian religion to an extent probably exceeding that of any other language. It is therefore important that its principles should be adjusted, and uniformity of spelling and pronunciation established and preserved, as far as the nature of a living language will admit. In regard to the great body of the language, its principles are now settled by usage, and are uniform in this country and the United States. But there are many points in which respectable men are not agreed, and it is the sincere desire of my fellow citizens that such a diversity may no longer exist. If a delegation of gentlemen from the two universities of Oxford and Cambridge could be induced to meet and consult on this subject, either in Oxford or Cambridge or in London, I would meet them with pleasure and lay before them such points of difference in the practice of the two countries as it is desirable to adjust, and the gentlemen would consider any other points that they might think it expedient to determine. . . ."

Professor Lee supplied Noah Webster with information concerning rooms, rules regulating library use, and mild enthusiasm concerning his remarks. No meeting of scholars was forthcoming although there were some regrets later that the quiet coming and going of the solitary researcher might have been better known. *"It would have been a great pleasure to many of my brethren here to have had more frequent opportunities of intercourse with you, & we are sorry not to have formed an earlier acquaintance with a gentleman of such attainments and character."*

Noah Webster at Cambridge

At a meeting of the Cambridge Bible Society Webster was graciously received and he reported *"what our people are doing in America for spreading the gospel, and among other things I told them that my fair countrywomen far outstrip the men in all works of Charity. . . ."*

But it was here at Cambridge, alone, amidst walls of historic and academic splendor that Noah Webster arrived at the last word in his monumental *American Dictionary*:

"I finished writing my Dictionary in January, 1825, at my lodgings in Cambridge, England. When I had come to the last word, I was seized with a trembling which made it somewhat difficult to hold my pen steady for writing. The cause seems to have been the thought that I might not then live to finish the work, or the thought that I was so near the end of my labors. But I summoned strength to finish the last word, and then walking about the room a few minutes I recovered."

Webster Completes the Last Word in His Great Dictionary

"It is interesting to know," *writes his granddaughter,* "that Webster himself performed the great manual as well as mental labor; for the entire work — with all the authorities, quotations, and passages cited to illustrate the meaning of words — was written out in his own hand. Such was also the fact with the *Synopsis of Words in Twenty Languages,* and indeed with the whole series of his productions from the earliest years of his life. He never had the aid of an amanuensis in any of his literary labors, except in the proof-reading of his *Dictionary* — and later in its revision when his eyes began to fail him, at the age of eighty."

The Entire Work Written in His Own Hand

English publishers, engaged in a new edition of Samuel Johnson's Dictionary were indifferent to Webster's scholarly research and refused his manuscript. Like his forebears Noah set sail for America and more hospitable shores. But, despite approval of the project, an American publisher was forthcoming only when Webster endorsed a large share of the cost. An agreement was finally made with Sherman Converse and on May 8, 1827 the printing was begun by Hezekiah Howe in New Haven. In November, 1828, the last pages were completed and bound into two bulky quarto volumes. At long last *An American Dictionary of the English Language* was finally complete!

What made the 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* of Noah Webster unique and distinct for its times?

First, in sheer number of words it surpassed every known dictionary adding 12,000 words to the latest Johnson edition and bringing the total number of words defined to 70,000. But it was in the selection of words that the *American Dictionary* completed its independence from the mother country, for it included a new vocabulary directly related to the American philosophy of government. The Christian concept of individual liberty and property established under the United States Constitution had produced, for the first time in human history, unlimited opportunity for every man and woman. An explosion of interest and exploration in every field occurred and invention and the arts flourished. Every man needed to know everything and thus a literary, Johnsonian type of dictionary was not sufficient for an American. New terms in science, industry and commerce were multiplying daily and these were significant in a country where men were independent and *"masters of their own persons and Lords of their own soil."*

Americans Require an American Dictionary

Second, Noah Webster's untiring etymological research had for the first time established the correct principle for arranging the definitions of words. He believed that all of the meanings of a word could be deduced from one fundamental idea:

"There is a primary sense of every word, from which all others have proceeded; and whenever this can be discovered, this sense should stand first in order."

Words could now be arranged with the etymologically primary meanings first. Webster's *Synopsis of Languages* became a useful tool with which he was able to trace the primary meaning of a word from its source, or head-waters, through the various tributaries of its meaning. This exactness in defining the original *idea* of a word freed the lexicographer from dependence on synonyms as substitutes for exact meaning. Changes of meanings in individual words Webster also anticipated and these distinctions were carefully traced and elaborated.

The "Idea" of a Word Defined

Third, Noah Webster set a standard of *purity* when he refused to admit the putrifying streams of *cant* and *vulgarism* into the main flow of American language:

"The authority of individuals is always liable to be called in question — but the unanimous consent of a nation, and a fixed principle interwoven with the very construction of

a language, coeval and co-extensive with it, are like the common laws of a land, or the immutable rules of morality, the propriety of which every man, however refractory, is forced to acknowledge, and to which most men will readily submit."

While the vitality of the young nation might contribute many new terms to the English Language yet *deviation* from the norm was not a criterion of legitimate lexicography. Diversity of expression was always to be balanced with the constancy of a fixed principle — liberty with law rather than freedom from control. Webster's prime example was physics *"where motion, the source of life, becomes the principle of destruction."*

In a letter to David Ramsay of Charlestown, who had informed him that the *"prejudices against any American attempt to improve Dr. Johnson are very strong in that city"* Webster questioned Johnson's impropriety in introducing many vulgarisms into his 1755 Dictionary:

Webster Censures Johnson's Vulgarisms

"It is questionable how far vulgar and cant words are to be admitted into a Dictionary; but one thing must be acknowledged by any man who will inspect the several dictionaries in the English language, that if any portion of such words are inadmissable, Johnson has transgressed the rules of lexicography beyond any other compiler; for his work contains more of the lowest of all vulgar words than any other now extant. . . . Let the admirers of Johnson's Dictionary be a little more critical in comparing his vocabulary and mine and blush for their illiberal treatment of me! Instead of *increasing* the list of vulgar terms, I have *reduced* it by expunging *two thirds* of such words inserted by Johnson! Any person who will have the patience and the candor to compare my dictionary with others will find that there is not a vocabulary of the English language extant so free from *local, vulgar,* and *obscene* words as mine! . . ."

Fourth, Noah Webster had the courage of his convictions when he placed the best American authors on a par with British authors. Taking a cue from Johnson, who asserted *"the chief glory of a nation arises from its authors,"* Webster affirmed:

"I do not indeed expect to add celebrity to the names of *Franklin, Washington, Adams, Jay, Madison, Marshall, Ramsay, Dwight, Smith, Trumbull, Hamilton, Belknap, Ames, Mason, Kent, Hare, Silliman, Cleaveland, Walsh, Irving,* and many other Americans distinguished by their writings or by their science; but it is with pride and satisfaction that I can place them as authorities on the same page with those of *Boyle, Hooker, Milton, Dryden, Addison, Ray, Milner, Cowper, Davy, Thomson,* and *Jameson. . . . Franklin* and *Washington,* whose language is their hereditary mother tongue, unsophisticated by modern grammar, present as pure models of genuine English as *Addison* or *Swift. . . .*"

Distinguished American Authors

Webster went farther and specified the fields in which *"our country has produced some of the best models of composition. . . ."* equalling the best of British authors and surpassed by none.

The question might be asked, what makes the 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* unique and distinct for *our* times?

Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary* remains today the pure repository of three essential ingredients of *America's Christian History.* It reflects our Christian philosophy of life, our Christian philosophy of government, and our Christian philosophy of education. Unmistakably it reveals the degree to which the Bible was America's basic textbook and how it was related to all fields. Noah Webster as a Christian scholar laid his foundation of etymology upon the Scriptures and his research into the origin of language stems from this premise. One cannot read his definitions nor study his discussion of the grammatical construction of our language without encountering at every point a Scriptural Christian philosophy of life.

Webster and America's Christian History

Noah Webster's words describing the American institutions of government indicate the distinctness of terms required when a nation such as ours has its origin in the Scriptures. Words like "govern," "government," "constitution," "fast-day," "republic," "democracy," and others reflect the uniqueness of America's Christian founding and God's purpose for her.

For more than 60 years Noah Webster devoted a major portion of his talents to defining and establishing an American Christian educational system. He recognized that the only effective defense against the influence of alien philosophies of government or education was to construct permanent foundations based upon the Word of God. Specifically, he provided the fundamental texts for spelling, grammar, reading, history, geography, civics, literature and an American dictionary. Written from a Christian, Biblical position, these texts taught pupils the

ingredients of Christian character needed to maintain our American republic.

Thus, today, the 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* represents a veritable treasury of America's Christian history and education. It provides us with a primary *source* for the original meaning of Christian Constitutional terms as used in the founding years of this nation.

With the publication of Noah Webster's *American Dictionary* began the *"war of the dictionaries"* taking up where the *"spelling book war"* had left off. Raging for many years after Webster's death the critics of his Biblical American system of language only helped to establish him as the final authority and arbiter in the field. A number of state legislatures voted Webster as the standard over his opponents. The courts and the *"counting house"* adopted him as did our national Congress. Even England finally elevated Noah Webster as supreme over Samuel Johnson. Webster's detractors succeeded in making his position more secure and certainly no author in America has been so plagiarized and imitated. Americans finally came to realize how much one man had contributed to bringing together the infinite diversity of many national origins under one national language. Wrote Southerner, Jefferson Davis in 1859:

Webster Becomes the Supreme Authority

"Above all other people we are one, and above all books which have united us in the bond of common language, I place the good Old Spelling-Book of Noah Webster. We have a unity of language no other people possess, and we owe this unity, above all else, to Noah Webster's Yankee Spelling-Book."

"A national language is a band of national union," wrote New Englander, Noah Webster in 1789, the year in which the Constitution of the United States was ratified:

"Let us then seize the present moment, and establish a *national language,* as well as a national government. Let us remember that there is a certain respect due to the opinions of other nations. As an independent people, our reputation abroad demands that in all things we should be federal; be *national;* for if we do not respect *ourselves,* we may be assured that *other* nations will not respect us. In short, let it be impressed upon the mind of every American that to neglect the means of commanding respect abroad is treason against the character and dignity of a brave independent people."

A National Language for Americans

One more task remained for Noah Webster — the crowning of his labors for his God and his country. This work, which he called *"the most important enterprise of my life,"* was the publication in 1833, in his 75th year, of the first American revised version of the Bible. *The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, in the Common Version. With Amendments of the language.* While other works would follow, the translation of the Scriptures from their original tongues represented the completion of his educational system for America.

The First American Revised Version of the Bible, 1833

Writing one hundred years after this event and celebrating the *Centenary of Noah Webster's Bible,* Dr. Harry Warfel states:

"By his *Institute* (speller, grammar, reader) he had supplied the correct standard for language in our schools; given a religious tone to all our textbooks, and had fostered patriotic pride. His *Dictionary* became the undisputed arbiter of spelling and definition. *The Bible,* the greatest popular textbook, needed amendment in language so it might conform to the American idiom. . . . The Bible gave Americans Scriptures for daily reading *correctly* translated into their own language. . . ."

Working in the tradition of earlier English scholars who desired that *"even a boy that driveth a plow"* should have access to the Scriptures in his own tongue, Noah Webster, like Tyndale, Luther, and Coverdale, labored to produce the first American version. He was unwilling to alter without cause the 1611 King James simplicity and beauty of langauge. He did wish, however, to correct those errors which impaired or obscured the message or offended decency. He worked in the original Hebrew and Greek, altering only those passages and words which seemed grammatically incorrect or obscure. He was particularly concerned with words which might offend:

Webster Amends Errors in the Bible

"The language of the Bible has no inconsiderable influence in forming and preserving our national language. On this account, the language of the common version ought to be correct in grammatical construction, and in the use of appropriate words. . . . Language which cannot be uttered in company without a violation of decorum or the rules of good breeding, exposes the scriptures to the scoffs of unbelievers, impairs their authority, and multi-

plies or confirms the enemies of our holy religion."

Forty years after Noah Webster's first American revision a company of theologians and linguists, both European and American, embarked on a similar venture. Commenting on these two efforts Mrs. Ford states:

"Moreover, the alterations of Webster are not nearly as numerous nor as marked as those of the Committee of Revision. His was the gentle removal from the face of a friend of the accidental smouch or defacement, done with a loving and tender hand. He led in the direction in which the revisers followed, but his love for the strong, simple Anglo-Saxon language made him stop far short of their changes, and in many ways they have gone far beyond him. Doubtless the combined wisdom of many educated minds may arrive at large results, yet there must always be compromise where many work together, and compromises are not convictions. The work of the individual has always more harmony, consistency, and directness than the work of separate minds combined."

Webster Worked Alone on His Revision of the Bible

For two years Noah Webster's edition of the Bible moved slowly amidst criticism until the honorable faculty of Yale recommended it. Thereafter it spread throughout the schools and churches of Connecticut until it was in use in almost every Congregational church. Demands for cheaper editions were forthcoming in 1839 and 1841. Webster, as educator to the republic, wrote a companion piece to his edition of the Bible in 1834 entitled *Value of the Bible, and the excellence of the Christian religion: for the use of families and schools.*

The rich years of fruition from 75 to 85 were vigorous and active, religiously, educationally and politically as Noah Webster continued to register his American Christian Constitutional principles by voice and in print. In 1832 appeared his *History of the United States,* a widely used text in American schools. While Noah Webster had been the first to introduce the study of American History into schoolbooks he had never devoted an entire work to the subject. The importance of this volume was its recording of *America's Christian History* as Webster traced the Hand of God and the relationship of America to Christianity and the Bible. In 1841 he prepared a second edition of the *American Dictionary,* and in 1843 *A Collection of Papers on Political, Literary & Moral Subjects* was published. Even the beloved *American Spelling Book* received one more revision and correction as it appeared in a new edition in 1843.

Webster's Christian United States History, 1832

But it was the family as the foundation of the republic which received Noah Webster's especial attention. Celebrating the Golden Anniversary of his marriage to Rebecca Greenleaf in 1839, Grandfather Noah Webster presented a new Bible to each grandchild, lovingly inscribed. He rejoiced in their growth of Christian character and conviction and as he made his annual journeys throughout the United States each summer he visited the homes of his son and daughters. His passing in 1843 surrounded by a devoted family and pastor is a tender testimonial to the depth of affection which bound this American Christian home to Christ and to each other.

Noah Webster represents the *"immense effect"* of one life — a *"small power wisely and steadily directed."* He worked as *one individual,* initiating, challenging and establishing. He was not impelled to action merely by *external* demand or provocation but as, documented by his own words, from within the inspiration of his own internal conviction.

Today, even as the *International Dictionary* which still bears his name is produced by a corps of trained scholars, specialists and editors, it is *startling* and *encouraging* to remember that Noah Webster's work in every field was *an individual production!*

The greatest legacy that Noah Webster leaves to us, his posterity — is the testimony of his own life and effort demonstrating unmistakably the power and influence of one individual — if that individual is consciously dedicated to Christ and country. As he states in the 1828 preface to his *American Dictionary:*

"To that great and benevolent Being, who, during the preparation of this work, has sustained a feeble constitution, amidst obstacles and toils, disappointments, infirmities, and depression; who has borne me and my manuscripts in safety across the Atlantic, and given me strength and resolution to bring this work to a close, I would present the tribute of my most grateful acknowledgements. And if the talent which he intrusted to my care, has not been put to the most profitable use in his service, I hope it has not been *'kept laid up in a napkin,'* and that any misapplication of it may be graciously forgiven."

Webster's Legacy of Individual Christian Character

ROSALIE J. SLATER

San Francisco, September 17, 1967

PREFACE.

In the year 1783, just at the close of the revolution, I published an elementary book for facilitating the acquisition of our vernacular tongue, and for correcting a vicious pronunciation, which prevailed extensively among the common people of this country. Soon after the publication of that work, I believe in the following year, that learned and respectable scholar, the Rev. Dr. Goodrich of Durham, one of the trustees of Yale College, suggested to me, the propriety and expediency of my compiling a dictionary, which should complete a system for the instruction of the citizens of this country in the language. At that time, I could not indulge the thought, much less the hope, of undertaking such a work; as I was neither qualified by research, nor had I the means of support, during the execution of the work, had I been disposed to undertake it. For many years therefore, though I considered such a work as very desirable, yet it appeared to me impracticable; as I was under the necessity of devoting my time to other occupations for obtaining subsistence.

About twenty seven years ago, I began to think of attempting the compilation of a Dictionary. I was induced to this undertaking, not more by the suggestion of friends, than by my own experience of the want of such a work, while reading modern books of science. In this pursuit, I found almost insuperable difficulties, from the want of a dictionary, for explaining many new words, which recent discoveries in the physical sciences had introduced into use. To remedy this defect in part, I published my Compendious Dictionary in 1806; and soon after made preparations for undertaking a larger work.

My original design did not extend to an investigation of the origin and progress of our language; much less of other languages. I limited my views to the correcting of certain errors in the best English Dictionaries, and to the supplying of words in which they are deficient. But after writing through two letters of the alphabet, I determined to change my plan. I found myself embarrassed, at every step, for want of a knowledge of the origin of words, which Johnson, Bailey, Junius, Skinner and some other authors do not afford the means of obtaining. Then laying aside my manuscripts, and all books treating of language, except lexicons and dictionaries, I endeavored, by a diligent comparison of words, having the same or cognate radical letters, in about twenty languages, to obtain a more correct knowledge of the primary sense of original words, of the affinities between the English and many other languages, and thus to enable myself to trace words to their source.

I had not pursued this course more than three or four years, before I discovered that I had to unlearn a great deal that I had spent years in learning, and that it was necessary for me to go back to the first rudiments of a branch of erudition, which I had before cultivated, as I had supposed, with success.

I spent ten years in this comparison of radical words, and in forming a synopsis of the principal words in twenty languages, arranged in classes, under their primary elements or letters. The result has been to open what are to me new views of language, and to unfold what appear to be the genuine principles on which these languages are constructed.

After completing this synopsis, I proceeded to correct what I had written of the Dictionary, and to complete the remaining part of the work. But before I had finished it, I determined on a voyage to Europe, with the view of obtaining some books and some assistance which I wanted; of learning the real state of the pronunciation of our language in England, as well as the general state of philology in that country; and of attempting to bring about some agreement or coincidence of opinions, in regard to unsettled points in pronunciation and grammatical construction. In some of these objects I failed; in others, my designs were answered.

It is not only important, but, in a degree necessary, that the people of this country, should have an *American Dictionary* of the English Language; for, although the body of the language is the same as in England, and it is desirable to perpetuate that sameness, yet some differences must exist. Language is the expression of ideas; and if the people of one country cannot preserve an identity of ideas, they cannot retain an identity of language. Now an

identity of ideas depends materially upon a sameness of things or objects with which the people of the two countries are conversant. But in no two portions of the earth, remote from each other, can such identity be found. Even physical objects must be different. But the principal differences between the people of this country and of all others, arise from different forms of government, different laws, institutions and customs. Thus the practice of hawking and hunting, the institution of heraldry, and the feudal system of England originated terms which formed, and some of which now form, a necessary part of the language of that country; but, in the United States, many of these terms are no part of our present language,—and they cannot be, for the things which they express do not exist in this country. They can be known to us only as obsolete or as foreign words. On the other hand, the institutions in this country which are new and peculiar, give rise to new terms or to new applications of old terms, unknown to the people of England; which cannot be explained by them and which will not be inserted in their dictionaries, unless copied from ours. Thus the terms, *land-office; land-warrant; location of land; consociation* of churches; *regent* of a university; *intendant* of a city; *plantation*, *selectmen*, *senate*, *congress*, *court*, *assembly*, *escheat*, &c. are either words not belonging to the language of England, or they are applied to things in this country which do not exist in that. No person in this country will be satisfied with the English definitions of the words *congress*, *senate* and *assembly*, *court*, &c. for although these are words used in England, yet they are applied in this country to express ideas which they do not express in that country. With our present constitutions of government, *escheat* can never have its feudal sense in the United States.

But this is not all. In many cases, the nature of our governments, and of our civil institutions, requires an appropriate language in the definition of words, even when the words express the same thing, as in England. Thus the English Dictionaries inform us that a *Justice* is one deputed by the *King* to do right by way of judgment—he is a *Lord* by his office—Justices of the peace are appointed by the *King's commission*—language which is inaccurate in respect to this officer in the United States. So *constitutionally* is defined by Todd or Chalmers, *legally*, but in this country the distinction between *constitution* and *law* requires a different definition. In the United States, a *plantation* is a very different thing from what it is in England. The word *marshal*, in this country, has one important application unknown in England or in Europe.

A great number of words in our language require to be defined in a phraseology accommodated to the condition and institutions of the people in these states, and the people of England must look to an American Dictionary for a correct understanding of such terms.

The necessity therefore of a Dictionary suited to the people of the United States is obvious; and I should suppose that this fact being admitted, there could be no difference of opinion as to the *time*, when such a work ought to be substituted for English Dictionaries.

There are many other considerations of a public nature, which serve to justify this attempt to furnish an American Work which shall be a guide to the youth of the United States. Most of these are too obvious to require illustration.

One consideration however which is dictated by my own feelings, but which I trust will meet with approbation in correspondent feelings in my fellow citizens, ought not to be passed in silence. It is this. "The chief glory of a nation," says Dr. Johnson, "arises from its authors." With this opinion deeply impressed on my mind, I have the same ambition which actuated that great man when he expressed a wish to give celebrity to Bacon, to Hooker, to Milton and to Boyle.

I do not indeed expect to add celebrity to the names of *Franklin*, *Washington*, *Adams*, *Jay*, *Madison*, *Marshall*, *Ramsay*, *Dwight*, *Smith*, *Trumbull*, *Hamilton*, *Belknap*, *Ames*, *Mason*, *Kent*, *Hare*, *Silliman*, *Cleaveland*, *Walsh*, *Irving*, and many other Americans distinguished by their writings or by their science; but it is with pride and satisfaction, that I can place them, as authorities, on the same page with those of *Boyle*, *Hooker*, *Milton*, *Dryden*, *Addison*, *Ray*, *Milner*, *Cowper*, *Davy*, *Thomson* and *Jameson*.

A life devoted to reading and to an investigation of the origin and principles of our vernacular language, and especially a particular examination of the best English writers, with a view to a comparison of their style and phraseology, with those of the best American writers, and with our colloquial usage, enables me to affirm with confidence, that the genuine English idiom is as well preserved by the unmixed English of this country, as it is by the best *English* writers. Examples to prove this fact will be found in the Introduction to this work. It is true, that many of our writers have neglected to cultivate taste, and the embellishments of style; but even these have written the language in its genuine *idiom*. In this respect, Franklin and Washington, whose language is their hereditary mother tongue, unsophisticated by modern grammar, present as pure models of genuine English, as Addison or

Swift. But I may go farther, and affirm, with truth, that our country has produced some of the best models of composition. The style of President Smith; of the authors of the Federalist; of Mr. Ames; of Dr. Mason; of Mr. Harper; of Chancellor Kent; [the prose] of Mr. Barlow; of the legal decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States; of the reports of legal decisions in some of the particular states; and many other writings; in purity, in elegance and in technical precision, is equaled only by that of the best British authors, and surpassed by that of no English compositions of a similar kind.

The United States commenced their existence under circumstances wholly novel and unexampled in the history of nations. They commenced with civilization, with learning, with science, with constitutions of free government, and with that best gift of God to man, the christian religion. Their population is now equal to that of England; in arts and sciences, our citizens are very little behind the most enlightened people on earth; in some respects, they have no superiors; and our language, within two centuries, will be spoken by more people in this country, than any other language on earth, except the Chinese, in Asia, and even that may not be an exception.

It has been my aim in this work, now offered to my fellow citizens, to ascertain the true principles of the language, in its orthography and structure; to purify it from some palpable errors, and reduce the number of its anomalies, thus giving it more regularity and consistency in its forms, both of words and sentences; and in this manner, to furnish a standard of our vernacular tongue, which we shall not be ashamed to bequeath to *three hundred millions of people*, who are destined to occupy, and I hope, to adorn the vast territory within our jurisdiction.

If the language can be improved in regularity, so as to be more easily acquired by our own citizens, and by foreigners, and thus be rendered a more useful instrument for the propagation of science, arts, civilization and christianity; if it can be rescued from the mischievous influence of sciolists and that dabbling spirit of innovation which is perpetually disturbing its settled usages and filling it with anomalies; if, in short, our vernacular language can be redeemed from corruptions, and our philology and literature from degradation; it would be a source of great satisfaction to me to be one among the instruments of promoting these valuable objects. If this object cannot be effected, and my wishes and hopes are to be frustrated, my labor will be lost, and this work must sink into oblivion.

This Dictionary, like all others of the kind, must be left, in some degree, imperfect; for what individual is competent to trace to their source, and define in all their various applications, popular, scientific and technical, *sixty* or *seventy thousand* words! It satisfies my mind that I have done all that my health, my talents and my pecuniary means would enable me to accomplish. I present it to my fellow citizens, not with frigid indifference, but with my ardent wishes for their improvement and their happiness; and for the continued increase of the wealth, the learning, the moral and religious elevation of character, and the glory of my country.

To that great and benevolent Being, who, during the preparation of this work, has sustained a feeble constitution, amidst obstacles and toils, disappointments, infirmities and depression; who has twice borne me and my manuscripts in safety across the Atlantic, and given me strength and resolution to bring the work to a close, I would present the tribute of my most grateful acknowledgments. And if the talent which he entrusted to my care, has not been put to the most profitable use in his service, I hope it has not been "kept laid up in a napkin," and that any misapplication of it may be graciously forgiven.

N. WEBSTER.

New Haven, 1828.